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ABSTRACT

The central theory of Paulo Freire's "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" is that all human beings are capable of engaging in a dialogical encounter with their world. Application of this theory to the bitter civil war that occurred in Zimbabwe from 1972 to 1979 leads to four conclusions. First, the lack of educational opportunity for the Africans and the unwillingness of the Rhodesian Front (RF) government to engage in a dialog was a major cause of the war. The more the RF refused to engage in dialog with the Africans, the more the prospects of a serious conflict and a military confrontation increased. Second, good national educational policy and the practice of democracy must exist together. However, the RF never practiced democracy in its relations with the Africans because of its belief that there are cultural differences that cannot be eliminated, and that belief became a justification for perpetuating oppression. Third, the only way the war could have been avoided was to have engaged the Africans in dialog about the educational process that would have led to dialog about other national issues. The fourth and last conclusion is that there comes a time when the oppressed use the limited education available to arouse a nationalistic feeling that motivates them to struggle for their own freedom. Substantiating material (32 footnotes and 1 table) is dispersed throughout the paper. (MLF)

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CULTURES IN COLLISION:
EDUCATION AND DIALOGICAL ENCOUNTER IN ZIMBABWE

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The theory of pedaogy of the oppressed has
application outside Latin America - Paulo Freire, in a
letter dated 30 October, 1984, to this individual.

INTRODUCTION: FREIRE'S THEORY IN PERSPECTIVE

The publication in 1970 of Paulo Freire's Pedaogy of the Oppressed must be regarded as one of the major events that took place in the Third World with respect of the development of a theory on human interaction and its results. But in all its wide publicity an important question has not been answered, and this is: Is the theory applicable to the Third World situations outside Latin America? This paper will attempt to provide an answer to this question by analysing the causes of the bitter civil war that occurred in Zimbabwe from 1972 to 1979.

Although Freire himself unequivocally stated, "The theory of Pedaogy of the Oppressed has application outside Latin America"¹, this individual has not been able to find any study that may suggest that it is indeed applicable to situations outside Latin America. This is the reason why this study is intended to test the applicability of the theory on the Zimbabwean crisis, a devastating civil war which placed the country into the pages of international news headlines. The central idea of Freire's theory that will be analysed relative to the crisis in Zimbabwe is his conclusion that no matter how

¹ Paulo Freire, in a letter dated 30 October, 1984, addressed to this individual.

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ignorant or submerged, all human beings are capable of engaging in a dialogical encounter with their world.

THE ELEMENTS AND MEANING OF DIALOGICAL ENCOUNTER

How does one explain the fact that the Africans of Zimbabwe moved from a relatively passive state of mind in 1890 to aggressively seeking independence under their own government beginning with the inauguration of the African National Congress (ANC) in 1957? How does one explain the behavior of the colonial government, especially that of Ian Smith from 1964 to 1979 in denying the Africans their own definition of self-determination? Answers to these questions constitute a set of essential elements of Freire's theory. His concept of the oppressor as a model of humanity² suggests the adaptability, not gullibility, of the Africans during the formative years of colonialism. But to listen to Earl Grey³ argue in 1898

Until we convince the Natives that this country is to be the country of the white man, they will go on hammering at the notion that one day they will be treated as equals...I am convinced, therefore, that the first step towards civilizing the Natives lies in a course of industrial training an manual labor, rather

² Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed [Trans. by M.B.Ramos], New York: Continuum, 1983. p. 30.

³ Earl Grey was the Administrator of Rhodesia from April 2, 1896 to December 4, 1898. His immediate predecessor was Leander Starr Jameson, who served from September 10, 1890 to April 1, 1896. Both Grey and Jameson were close associates of Cecil John Rhodes, the financier of the British South Africa Company, which ruled Rhodesia from 1890 to 1923.

than in religious dogma.⁴

is to witness the laying of a foundation of a cultural and dialogical encounter that later translated into an outright civil war.

But to listen also to Godfrey Huggins⁵ boast in 1952 about the superiority of the white man over the Africans,

We must reject permanently the thinking that democracy consists of mere counting of heads.... We must unhesitatingly accept the doctrine that our superiority over the Natives rests on our superiority of education, cultural values, civilization, and heredity, and must be sufficiently realistic to appreciate that we have a paramount monopoly of these qualities⁶,

is indeed to witness the demonstration of the validity of an important aspect of Freire's theory that a pedagogy that emanates from the oppressor's desire to sustain oppression manifests itself in his cultural arrogance which he uses as an instrument of dehumanization of the oppressed⁷. In this context, dialogical encounter, which Freire defines as a constructive exchange of ideas to find solutions to national problems, is given no chance of success as the oppressor demonstrates his complete disrespect of the oppressed. One must wonder how Grey's and Huggins'

⁴ British South Africa Company Records, Earl Grey: G.R./1/1/11: Folios 547 - 588. Quoted by permission of Zimbabwe National Archives.

⁵ Godfrey Huggins was the prime minister of Rhodesia from 1933 to 1952 and of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland from 1953 to 1956. The Federation was dissolved in December, 1963, due to unrelenting opposition from the Africans.

⁶ Southern Rhodesia, "The Papers of Godfrey Huggins, 1933 - 1956". Quoted by permission of Zimbabwe National Archives.

⁷ Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed. p. 39.

attitudes towards the Africans contributed to the failure of dialogue as Freire defines it.

Freire's view that prescription is one basic element of the relationships between the oppressor and the oppressed manifests itself in the immeasurable intolerance of the colonial government in Zimbabwe towards the educational and intellectual development of the Africans. The unfortunate thing of this negative attitude is that the devastating effect of this Victorian perception of African culture steadily found its way into the relationships between the Westerners and Africans of the 20th century. What Westerners, especially the colonial officials in Africa, failed to understand and appreciate about Africans is that while they were establishing colonial empires in the 19th century, they created a social environment for serious political problems to emerge by failing to develop a set of principles that would make dialogue possible between them and the Africans. This is how Freire's concept of the oppressor's desire to perpetuate oppression came into play in Zimbabwe and elsewhere in Africa.

The pain of self-discovery, which, like childbirth, Freire says is a joyful occasion⁸, reveals itself profoundly in the ability of the Africans to utilize the limited education available in the colonial context to arouse a nationalistic consciousness which in turn enabled them to see their situation of colonial oppression from its proper perspective. When Freire argues that dialogical encounter between the oppressor and the

⁸ Ibid. p.33

oppressed comes into sharper focus when the former recognize that their freedom is achieved by conquest, not as a gift of the oppressor⁹, he sounds like he was reading something intrinsic in the Africans' definition of their consciousness as an important element of education and as a major factor of dialogical encounter.

There is therefore no question that by 1962, the Africans of Zimbabwe were fully aware of the effect of this consciousness on their ability to contribute ideas in search of solution to problems of cultural interaction. This is why, on December 9 of that year the Zimbabwe African Peoples Union (ZAPU) stated the principles that it believed would influence the relationship between the Africans and the colonial establishment:

We are concerned only with our determination to fight for an immediate liquidation of the socio-economic, political and educational exploitation to which the colonial forces have subjected us¹⁰.

To conclude that in this statement ZAPU was calling on the colonial government to recognize the imperative nature of its moving aggressively to establish the conditions of dialogue between it and the Africans as the only realistic and viable means of solving problems of human conflict is to suggest that the colonial authorities must abandon their Victorian perspective from which they viewed the Africans. But, instead, the Rhodesia Front (RF) government that came to power on December 17, one week

⁹ Ibid. p.67

¹⁰ ZAPU, Statement of Principles and Objectives, December 9, 1962. Quoted by permission of Zimbabwe National Archives.

after the ZAPU statement, issued a statement of its own as part of its policy for the future. In stating

The party opposes racial integration and recognizes the right of the government to provide separate facilities, including education, for the various racial groups to preserve their culture, customs, and ways of life¹¹,

the RF was ruling out any possibility of a dialogical interaction between itself and the Africans. Freire concludes that this is a recipe for social conflict. It is also relatively simple to see that the reason that the RF was taking this line of action is that it would have to recognize the essential elements of what Freire suggests constitute an important prerequisite of dialogue: equality between participants, respect of self-determination and self-consciousness, a desire to eliminate the oppressor-oppressed contradiction, and making a genuine effort to eliminate an educational policy designed to indoctrinate the oppressed to adjust them to the world of oppression¹².

The obvious result of this indiscretion is that the colonial government lost a golden opportunity to engage the Africans in dialogue in search of solutions to the increasing political problems that it was creating by its obsession with the sustenance of white supremacy as it had existed in the 19th century. The RF's inability to understand that in the powerlessness of the Africans lay the elements of their power to

¹¹ The Rhodesia Front, "Statement of Principles and Policies". Ref.Gen.1-1/110/21708, 1962. Quoted by permission Zimbabwe National Archives.

¹² Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, p.67.

realize that their education must not, as Freire concludes, seek their improvement within the existing system, but a total transformation of the socio-economic and political milieu in which they were cast¹³ as a fulfillment of their consciousness. Indeed, in all countries under colonial domination, the state of powerlessness gives rise to the nationalistic consciousness which eventually leads to a struggle for freedom.

The refusal of the colonial government in Zimbabwe from 1957 to 1965 to formulate educational policy that would have sharpened the Africans' own sense of self diminished the ability of both racial groups to engage in dialogue. This in turn diminished the prospects of peaceful co-existence and increased the prospects of a racial conflict. Therefore, the environment that existed between the Africans and the colonial government was destined to produce a serious conflict because dialogical contradiction that emerged found a way of expressing itself in the variations of cultural differences and political expediency that became the basis of colonial policy and behavior. The reality of this tragedy was recognized by the Brown Commission of Inquiry, which reported in 1960

In the contact sphere between two widely different cultures, a seemingly simple and reasonable communication was tragically misunderstood causing distrust and deeply injured feelings which are bound to damage relations afterwards¹⁴.

¹³ Ibid., p. 61.

¹⁴ Southern Rhodesia, "The Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Discontent in the Mangwende Reserve". Ref. Government Notice Number 408/1960 [James Scott Brown, Chairman], 28 October,

The reality of Freire's conclusion that education for the oppressed is designed to serve the egoistic interests of the oppressor¹⁵ is graphically illustrated in the Zimbabwean conflict by examining some educational statistics, especially expenditure for education from 1971 to 1979, during which the RF was at the height of its political power.

RF Expenditure for White Education and
African education as products of GNP in \$m

Year	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979
GNP	1244	1419	1553	1861	2012	2179	2216	2339	2825
White	16.20	17.39	18.59	19.15	20.02	19.98	20.47	23.04	26.06
Black	1.78	1.71	1.61	1.85	1.98	2.22	2.53	4.06	3.89
Total	17.98	19.10	20.20	21.00	22.10	22.20	23.00	27.10	29.95

Source: Zimbabwe: Digest of Manthly Statistics, 1981.

Freire's view that the oppressor fails to see that having education to facilitate dialogical interaction is a condition of being fully human¹⁶ comes into play in the Zimbabwean conflict in that one serious outcome of the colonial practice is that whatever the colonial officials defined as a two-way communication street between them and the Africans was, in effect, a monologue, "a constant dictatorial relationship"¹⁷, which led to an eventual breakdown in the application of the elements of positive human interaction. That this interaction failed to involve the educational process in developing

1960. Quoted by permission of Zimbabwe National Archives.

¹⁵ Paulo Freire, Pedaqoqy of the Oppressed.p.46.

¹⁶ Ibid. p. 44

¹⁷ Ibid. p.35

dialogical skills among the people of both cultural and racial groups robbed the colonial society of an opportunity to enable its members to think critically about how best to solve national problems. This is how the educational process during the colonial period, especially during the RF administration, was nothing more than an exercise in reducing the intellectual level of the students to the position where traditional colonial intent would be sustained¹⁸.

One can readily see that in this kind of context the development of positive dialogical interaction lost its meaning as dialogical encounter with its confrontational feature, emerged to take its place. But with the elements of positive and constructive interaction eroded away by the self-seeking action of the colonial government, an important phenomenon emerged as a new element of cultural interaction, and that is, dialogical encounter was steadily giving way to political conflict and military confrontation. When a shooting war finally started in April, 1966, the course to it had been a long and frustrating experience for the Africans since the colonization of Zimbabwe in 1890.

THE FAILURE OF DIALOGUE AND THE SUCCESS OF MILITARY ACTION

When Freire concludes that all human beings, regardless of how they are oppressed or ignorant, are quite capable of interacting critically with others in a dialogical encounter, he does not suggest by any means that this is as far as they can go

¹⁸ Ibid. p. 57.

in realizing the influence of their consciousness. Rather, he is suggesting that when the elements of constructive dialogical interaction have been rendered meaningless by a deliberate action of the oppressor, and have, thus, failed, the oppressed design an new strategy of using the limited educational opportunity they have for their own liberation. They will not surrender that consciousness to the will of the oppressor. This is why Freire concludes that to participate in an educational process of any kind is to participate in a struggle for self-liberation.

We must now ask the question: How did the failure of dialogue in the educational process cause the war that placed colonial Zimbabwe into the pages of international news headlines from 1972 to 1979?¹⁹. To conclude that the constructive dialogical interaction between the Africans and the colonial government failed because the latter had an interpretation of education different from that of the former is to recognize that this failure translated into an entirely new kind of relationships between them, confrontation. Canaan Banana, the State President of Zimbabwe since 1980, put this reality into proper perspective when he wrote

Education helps people to discover the nature of their

¹⁹ It must be remembered that although the war took a dramatic turn in 1972 and finally came to an end with the defeat of the colonial forces in December, 1979, it had actually started in April, 1966. However, Ian Smith told this individual during an interview that it had started in December, 1962, the year that his right-wing Rhodesia Front party was returned to power in the general election held on December 16, 1962.

relationship with the world²⁰ in terms of wider perspective of human relationships. The nature of this relationship is determined by the response of those in positions of power....Failure to allow dialogue on conditions mutually agreed upon leads to an inevitable conflict and struggle for self-liberation²¹.

It is not surprising that the colonial governments in Africa, not only in Zimbabwe, did not really want to see the Africans develop their intellectual potential because this action would be tantamount to acknowledging it as an important prerequisite that Freire says is essential to critical thinking and important to human interaction. This would mean that the colonial government recognized that the Africans possessed human qualities in the same way as the whites. What basis then would exist to justify the colonial decision to perpetuate the Victorian notion of white superiority and inequality in society?

The events that followed the RF unilateral declaration of independence on November 11, 1965, evince Freire's view that the failure of constructive dialogical interaction leads to a conflict from which the oppressed emerge victors²². Characterizing the Africans as primitive, Ian Smith finally admitted his Victorian perception of the Africans in a boastful

²⁰ This philosophical viewpoint is strikingly similar to Freire's concept of dialogical encounter and interaction which he says the rise of self-consciousness makes possible. Banana was evidently making reference to the effect of the rise of African nationalism, which Freire also regards as important in the struggle for freedom.

²¹ Canaan Banana, Theology of Promise: The Dynamics of self-reliance. Harare: The College Press, 1982, p. 62.

²² Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, p. 131.

statement that he issued to explain why his government had ceased power from Sir Humphrey Gibbs, the governor appointed by Britain, and declared the country independent unilaterally

The mantle of the pioneers has fallen on our shoulders to sustain civilization in a primitive country. We are fortified by our courage and determination to overcome any difficulties²³.

This finally convinced the Africans that the RF was really not interested in engaging them in dialogue because its leaders believed that they were primitive. Herbert Chitepo, a brilliant African lawyer and politician, put the African case into proper perspective when he said,

Because we are forced to acquiesce to colonial educational policies, time has come for us to change tactics. We can no longer ask the regime to talk to us, it will not talk to us. We must therefore confront it.²⁴

What Chitepo observed as the reason why the RF refused to engage the Africans in dialogue was proved correct by what Smith himself and Andrew Skeen, an RF spokesman, said in an attempt to sustain the position of power that the whites had enjoyed for many years. Admitting that the RF had actually turned the country into a police state, Smith argued in 1966,

When you have a primitive people such as the Africans of this country are, it would have been irresponsible

²³ Ian Smith, "Rhodesia's Finest Hour: Declaration of Independence", November 11, 1965. Quoted by permission of Zimbabwe National Archives.

²⁴ Zimbabwe: "The Road to Freedom", a documentary film produced by Zimbabwe African National Union [ZANU], featuring Herbert Chitepo, President, 1966. Quoted by permission Zimbabwe Ministry of Information

of the government not to have done so²⁵.

Skeen was even more blunt as he argued

We in Rhodesia are determined to control the rate of African advancement till time and education can make it a safe possibility. Besides we wish to retain the power to retard African educational development to ensure that power remains in civilized and responsible hands²⁶.

When Freire suggests that for a revolution to succeed, the oppressed must become conscious of the need to end their oppression²⁷, he seems to conclude that the oppressed's recognition of the need to liberate themselves must of necessity entail a decision to confront their oppressor when dialogue has failed. This line of Freire's thinking is most convincing in the statement that Washington Malianga, a spokesman for ZANU that Chitepo was president of, issued on April 30, 1966, following a fierce battle between the African nationalist guerrillas and the RF forces the previous day.

We can longer allow the colonial regime to use the curtailment of our education as an instrument of perpetuating itself. This brutal tactic must be brought to an unconditional end. It must now pay for its refusal to engage in dialogue with us. We will match violence with violence and fight fire with fire²⁸.

²⁵ Rhodesia: Parliamentary Debates, 1965 - 1969"

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, p. 157

²⁸ Washington Malianga, "We shall wage an all-out war to liberate ourselves from colonial oppression", a statement issued April 30, 1966 following a fierce battle between the African nationalist guerrillas and the RF forces at Sinoia. Quoted by permission of Zimbabwe National Archives.

With this battle the war of liberation and the restrotation of Zimbabwe began. By the time that it came to an end in December, 1979, more than 200,000 lives had been needlessly lost, but it also meant the end of colonialism. Therefore, the failure of dialogue led to the success of military action to bring the oppressive colonial domination to an unconditional end.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DIALOGUE AND DEMOCRACY IN THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS

We have furnished clear evidence in this study to show that the refusal of the colonial government to engage the Africans in dialogue in the educational process was the main cause of racial and cultural conflict in Zimbabwe. Further, evidence has been shown that the unwillingness and inability of the RF to design an educational policy that would have enabled the Africans to play an effective role in national affairs made a major contribution to the creation of an environment of military conflict. In 1983, Methodist Bishop Abel Muzorewa, who served as interim prime minister in 1979, put this civil war into perpsepctive when he said,

Clearly the RF's educational policy had gone too far. We knew that its educational policy was covered under the cloak of apartheid. Its refusal to engage in dialogue with us was an admission of its own weaknesses...It was clear to us that the RF had lost the purpose for which it had existed, to serve all the people on equal basis..., it had therefore to go²⁹.

Ian Smith himself admitted that the educational policy of his

²⁹ Abel Muzorewa, during an interview with this individual in Harare, Zimbabwe, July 28, 1983.

government was responsible for the civil war.

He knew that there was a gap between white education and black education. This was not due to any thing that we did, it was part of our history....Before World War II the Africans did not believe in education because they thought that it was something that belonged to the white man....So we went out of our way to provide facilities, but we recognized that what we did was not enough...If we had to do it all over again, we would do it differently, we would invite the Africans to participate fully in formulating a national educational policy³⁰.

The civil war in Zimbabwe leads to four conclusions relative to Freire's theory. The first is that there is no question that the lack of adequate educational opportunity for the Africans and the unwillingness of the RF government to engage in dialogue was a major cause of the war. It is not certain that dialogical interaction would have made it possible for the Africans to secure more educational opportunity, but it is quite certain that bridges of human communication would have been established and that the two racial groups would have placed their confidence in each other as they cooperated in finding solutions to the educational problems that they faced. In the wake of the rise of African nationalism it was not possible for the RF to perpetuate its political domination by attempting to sustain the Victorian principles that had helped in creating conditions of colonization itself. Therefore, the more the RF refused to engage in dialogue with the Africans, the more the prospects of a serious conflict increased and the more the danger of a military confrontation

³⁰ Ian Smith, prime minister of Rhodesia from 1964 to 1979, during an interview with this individual in Harare, Zimbabwe, July 20, 1983.

also increased. By the time Smith recognized the error of the policy of his government, it was too late.

The second conclusion is that good national educational policy and the practice of democracy are like love and marriage, one cannot have one without the other. The reason why the RF, indeed, any colonial government for that matter, never practiced democracy in its relations with the Africans is what Freire suggests in his theory, and that is, the oppressor puts a distance between himself and the oppressed because he believes that there are cultural differences that cannot be eliminated. This claim of an irreconcilable cultural differences became a justification for perpetuating oppression. The characteristics that Freire says constitute an antidiological action - conquest, divide and rule, manipulation, and cultural invasion³¹ - are all present in the RF political behavior. As Freire also suggests, these proved to be the demise of the RF itself, the oppressor.

The third conclusion is that the only way the bitter civil war in Zimbabwe could have been avoided is to engage the Africans in dialogue in the educational process. It is important to keep in mind that success in dialogical interaction about the educational process would have set the stage for success of dialogue in other national issues. The educational process was the most important aspect of national life because it determined where one lived, the kind of employment opportunity one was entitled to, the level of income, the right to participate in

³¹ Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, p. 133.

national affairs, political, social, and in any other way. The truth of the matter is that solution of the educational problems meant solution of other national problems. But because the RF was aware that the search for solution to national problems meant its demonstrated willingness to end racial discrimination and inequality in society, it held the educational process as the key to maintaining the position of power in the country. Ending racial discrimination in the educational process would mean in effect paving way for the advent of a black government. Although its leaders claimed that the Africans were primitive, the real reason why the RF declined to engage the Africans in dialogue in the educational process was its deep-seated fear of the advent of a black government.

The fourth and last conclusion is that in arguing that the oppressor designs an educational policy for the oppressed to serve his own egoistic interests, Freire goes on to conclude that no matter how long it will take, there comes a time when the oppressed use the limited education available to arouse a nationalistic feeling which in turn motivates them to struggle for their own freedom. This study has furnished the evidence to show that all people, not just the Africans of Zimbabwe, resent the existence of any government that is less than democratic. This is why one hears about coups and countercoups in many countries of the Third world. This is a lesson that many national leaders in Africa have yet to learn.

Although, following the general elections of 1980, the

government of Zimbabwe announced that it would respect democracy and govern in accordance with the wishes of the people, the greatest threat to the educational innovation³² that it initiated still comes from the announcement in 1984 that Zimbabwe would become a one-party state under a ZANU government led by Robert Mugabe following its expected victory in the general election to be held in June, 1985. If this happens, the experiment in democracy which Zimbabweans have enjoyed in five years of their independence will have been short-lived. All over Africa the philosophy of one-party government has shown evidence that it robs the people of a genuine desire and effective role in the promotion of ideas of national development and replaces their confidence and hope for the future with an abyss of despair. In this kind of setting educational attainment has only peripheral outcome because individual incentive and self-motivation, which are important characteristics of human achievement, are rendered meaningless by the government's own definition of national progress and desire to have its own political philosophy prevail at the expense of that of the individual. Therefore, the introduction of a one-party state is an action that Zimbabwe is advised to avoid at all costs. Rather, it should preserve democracy of a two-party system in which dialogical interaction remains a fundamental principle of national policy and purpose.

³² For a discussion and analysis of this innovation see, for example, Dickson A. Mungazi, "Educational Innovation in Zimbabwe: Possibilities and Problems", in The Journal of Negro Education, Vol. 54, No. 2, Spring, 1985, pps. 196 - 212.

When the individual retains the right to express himself in an unrestricted manner, the nation as a whole will prosper. When this right is taken away both the individual and the nation become oppressed by a combination of powerful forces, such as intolerance, lack of new ideas, political dissent. New ideas only come when freedom of speech is recognized as a sacred principle of national unity. This is the message that Freire would like all members of the Third World to accept.